

The New Government and the Proletariat

The principal document I have at my disposal at today's date (March 8/21) is a copy of that most conservative and bourgeois English newspaper *The Times* of March 16, containing a batch of reports about the revolution in Russia. Clearly, a source more favourably inclined—to put it mildly—towards the Guchkov and Milyukov government it would not be easy to find.

This newspaper's correspondent reports from St. Petersburg on Wednesday, March 1 (14), when the *first* Provisional Government still existed, i.e., the thirteen—member Duma Executive Committee,^[2] headed by Rodzyanko and including two “socialists”, as the newspaper puts it, Kerensky and Chkheidze:

“A group of 22 elected members of the Upper House [State Council] including M. Guchkov, M. Stakhovich, Prince Trubetskoi, and Professor Vassiliev, Grimm, and Vernadsky, yesterday addressed a telegram to the Tsar” imploring him in order to save the “dynasty”, etc., etc., to convoke the Duma and to name as the head of the government someone who enjoys the “confidence of the nation”. “What the Emperor may decide to do on his arrival today is unknown at the hour of telegraphing,” writes the correspondent, “but one thing is quite certain. Unless His Majesty immediately complies with the wishes of the most moderate elements among his loyal subjects, the influence at present exercised by the Provisional Committee of the Imperial Duma will pass wholesale into the hands of the socialists, who want to see a republic established, but who are unable to institute any kind of orderly government and would inevitably precipitate the country into anarchy within and disaster without....”

What political sagacity and clarity this reveals. How well this Englishman, who thinks like (if he does not guide) the Guchkovs and Milyukovs, understands the alignment of class forces and interests! “The most moderate elements among his loyal subjects”, i.e., the monarchist landlords and capitalists, want to take power into their hands, fully realising that otherwise “influence” will pass into the hands of the “socialists”. Why the “socialists” and not somebody else? Because the English Guchkovite is fully aware that there is *no* other social force in the political arena, *nor can there be*. The revolution was made by the proletariat. It displayed heroism; it shed its blood; it swept along with it the broadest masses of the toilers and the poor; it is demanding bread, peace and freedom; it is demanding a republic; it sympathises with socialism. But the handful of landlords and capitalists headed by the Guchkovs and Milyukovs want to betray the will, or strivings, of the vast majority and conclude a *deal with the tottering monarchy*,

bolster it up, save it: appoint Lvov and Guchkov, Your Majesty, and we will be with the monarchy against the people. Such is the entire meaning, the sum and substance of the new government's policy!

But how to justify the deception, the fooling of the people, the violation of the will of the overwhelming majority of the population?

By slandering the people—the old but eternally new method of the bourgeoisie. And the English Guchkovite slanders, scolds, spits and splutters: “anarchy within and disaster without”, no “orderly government”!!

That is not true, Mr. Guchkovite! The workers want a republic; and a republic represents far more “orderly” government than monarchy does. What guarantee have the people that the second Romanov will not get himself a second Rasputin? Disaster will be brought on precisely by continuation of the war, i.e., precisely by the new government. Only a proletarian republic, backed by the rural workers and the poorest section of the peasants and town dwellers, can secure peace, provide bread, order and freedom.

All the shouts about anarchy are merely a screen to conceal the selfish interests of the capitalists, who want to make profit out of the war, out of war loans, who want to restore the monarchy *against* the people.

“... Yesterday,” continues the correspondent, “the Social-Democratic Party issued a proclamation of a most seditious character, which was spread broadcast throughout the city. They [i.e., the Social-Democratic Party] are mere doctrinaires, but their power for mischief is enormous at a time like the present. M. Kerensky and M. Chkheidze, who realise that without the support of the officers and the more moderate elements of the people they cannot hope to avoid anarchy, have to reckon with their less prudent associates, and are insensibly driven to take up an attitude which complicates the task of the Provisional Committee....”

O great English, Guchkovite diplomat! How “imprudently” you have blurted out the truth!

“The Social-Democratic Party” and their “less prudent associates” with whom “Kerensky and Chkheidze have to reckon”, evidently mean the Central or the St. Petersburg Committee of our Party, which was restored at the January 1912 Conference,^[3] those very same “Bolsheviks” at whom the bourgeoisie always hurl the abusive term “doctrinaires”, because of their faithfulness to the “doctrine”, i.e., the fundamentals, the principles, teachings, aims of *socialism*. Obviously, the English Guchkovite hurls the abusive terms seditious and doctrinaire at the manifesto^[4] and at

the conduct of our Party in urging a fight for a republic, peace, complete destruction of the tsarist monarchy, bread for the people.

Bread for the people and peace—that's sedition, but ministerial posts for Guchkov and Milyukov—that's "order" Old and familiar talk!

What, then, are the tactics of Kerensky and Chkheidze as characterised by the English Guchkovite?

Vacillation: on the one hand, the Guchkovite praises them: they "realise" (Good boys! Clever boys!) that without the "support" of the army officers and the more moderate elements, anarchy cannot be avoided (we, however, have always thought, in keeping with our doctrine, with our socialist teachings, that it is the capitalists who introduce anarchy and war into human society, that only the transfer of *all* political power to the proletariat and the poorest people can rid us of war, of anarchy and starvation!). On the other hand, they "have to reckon with their less prudent associates", i.e., the Bolsheviks, the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, restored and united by the Central Committee.

What is the force that compels Kerensky and Chkheidze to "reckon" with the Bolshevik Party to which they have *never* belonged, which they, or their literary representatives (Socialist-Revolutionaries, Popular Socialists,^[5] the Menshevik O. C. supporters, and so forth), have always abused, condemned, denounced as an insignificant underground circle, a sect of doctrinaires, and so forth? Where and when has it ever happened that in time of revolution, at a time of predominantly *mass* action, sane-minded politicians should "reckon" with "doctrinaires"??

He is all mixed up, our poor English Guchkovite; he has failed to produce a logical argument, has failed to tell either a whole lie or the whole truth, he has merely given himself away.

Kerensky and Chkheidze are compelled to reckon with the Social-Democratic Party of the Central Committee by the influence it exerts on the proletariat, on the masses. Our Party was found to be with the masses, with the revolutionary proletariat, *in spite* of the arrest and deportation of our Duma deputies to Siberia, as far back as 1914, in spite of the fierce persecution and arrests to which the St. Petersburg Committee was subjected for its underground activities during the war, against the war and against tsarism.

"Facts are stubborn things," as the English proverb has it. Let me remind you of it, most esteemed English Guchkovite! That our Party guided, or at least rendered devoted assistance to, the St. Petersburg workers in the great days of revolution is a fact the English Guchkovite "*himself*" was *obliged* to admit. And he was equally obliged

to admit the fact that Kerensky and Chkheidze are oscillating *between* the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The Gvozdyovites, the “defencists”, i.e., the social-chauvinists, i.e., the defenders of the imperialist, predatory war, are now completely following the bourgeoisie; Kerensky, by entering the ministry, i.e., the second Provisional Government, has also completely deserted to the bourgeoisie; Chkheidze has not; he continues to *oscillate* between the Provisional Government of the bourgeoisie, the Guchkovs and Milyukovs, and the “provisional government” of the proletariat and the poorest masses of the people, the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies and the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party united by the Central Committee.

Consequently, the revolution has confirmed what we especially insisted on when we urged the workers clearly to realise the class difference between the principal parties and principal trends in the working—class movement and among the petty bourgeoisie—what we wrote, for example, in the Geneva *Sotsial-Demokrat* No. 47, nearly eighteen months ago, on October 13, 1915.

“As hitherto, we consider it admissible for Social-Democrats to join a provisional revolutionary government together with the democratic petty bourgeoisie, but not with the revolutionary chauvinists. By revolutionary chauvinists we mean those who want a victory over tsarism so as to achieve victory over Germany—plunder other countries—consolidate Great-Russian rule over the other peoples of Russia, etc. Revolutionary chauvinism is based on the class position of the petty bourgeoisie. The latter always vacillates between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. At present it is vacillating between chauvinism (which prevents it from being consistently revolutionary, even in the meaning of a democratic revolution) and proletarian internationalism. At the moment the Trudoviks, the Socialist-Revolutionaries, *Nasha Zarya* (now *Dyelo*), Chkheidze’s Duma group, the Organising Committee, Mr. Plekhanov and the like are political spokesmen for this petty bourgeoisie in Russia. If the revolutionary chauvinists won in Russia, we would be opposed to a defence of *their* “fatherland” in the present war. Our slogan is: against the chauvinists, even if they are revolutionary and republican—[against them and for an alliance of the international proletariat for the socialist revolution.](#)”^[1]

But let us return to the English Guchkovite.

“... The Provisional Committee of the Imperial Duma,” he continues, “appreciating the dangers ahead, have purposely refrained from carrying out the original intention of arresting Ministers, although they could have done so yesterday without the slightest difficulty. The door is thus left open for negotiations, thanks to which we [“we”=British finance capital and imperialism] may obtain all the benefits of the new regime without passing through the dread ordeal of the Commune and the anarchy of civil war....”

The Guchkovites were *for* a civil war from which *they* would benefit, but they are *against* a civil war from which the people, i.e., the actual majority of the working people, would benefit.

“...The relations between the Provisional Committee of the Duma, which represents the whole nation [imagine saying this about the committee of the landlord and capitalist Fourth Duma!], and the Council of Labour Deputies, representing purely class interests [this is the language of a diplomat who has heard learned words with one ear and wants to conceal the fact that the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies represents the proletariat and the poor, i.e., nine-tenths of the population], but in a crisis like the present wielding enormous power, have aroused no small misgivings among reasonable men regarding the possibility of a conflict between them—the results of which might be too terrible to describe.

“Happily this danger has been averted, at least for the present [note the “at least”!], thanks to the influence of M. Kerensky, a young lawyer of much oratorical ability, who clearly realises [unlike Chkheidze, who also “realised”, but evidently less clearly in the opinion of the Guchkovite?] the necessity of working with the Committee in the interests of his Labour constituents [i.e., to catch the workers’ votes, to flirt with them]. A satisfactory agreement^[6] was concluded today [Wednesday, March 1/14], whereby all unnecessary friction will be avoided.”

What this agreement was, whether it was concluded with the *whole* of the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies and on what terms, we do not know. On this *chief* point, the English Guchkovite says nothing at all this time. And no wonder! It is not to the advantage of the bourgeoisie to have these terms made clear, precise and known to all, for it would then be more difficult for it to violate them!

The preceding lines were already written when I read two very important communications. First, in that most conservative and bourgeois Paris newspaper *Le Temps*^[7] of March 20, the text of the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies manifesto appealing for “support” of the new government^[8]; second, excerpts from Skobelev’s speech in the State Duma on March 1 (14), reproduced in a Zurich newspaper (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 1 Mit.-bl., March 21) from a Berlin newspaper (*National Zeitung*^[9]).

The manifesto of the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies, if the text has not been distorted by the French imperialists, is a most remarkable document. It shows that the St. Petersburg proletariat, at least at the time the manifesto was issued, was under the predominating influence of petty-bourgeois politicians. You will recall that in this category of politicians I include, as has been already mentioned above, people of the type of Kerensky and Chkheidze.

In the manifesto we find two political ideas, and two slogans corresponding to them: Firstly. The manifesto says that the government (the new one) consists of “moderate elements”. A strange description, by no means complete, of a purely liberal, not of a Marxist character. I too am prepared to agree that in a certain sense—in my next letter I will show in precisely what sense—now, with the first stage of the revolution completed, every government must be “moderate”. But it is absolutely impermissible to conceal from ourselves and from the people that this government wants to continue the imperialist, war, that it is an agent of British capital, that it wants to restore the monarchy and strengthen the rule of the landlords and capitalists.

The manifesto declares that all democrats must “support” the new government and that the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies requests and authorises Kerensky to enter the Provisional Government. The conditions—implementation of the promised reforms already during the war, guarantees for the “free cultural” (only??) development of the nationalities (a purely Cadet, wretchedly liberal programme), and the establishment of a special committee consisting of members of the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies and of “military men”[\[10\]](#) to supervise the activities of the Provisional Government.

This Supervising Committee, which comes within the second category of ideas and slogans, we will discuss separately further on.

The appointment of the Russian Louis Blanc, Kerensky, and the appeal to support the new government is, one may say, a classical example of betrayal of the cause of the revolution and the cause of the proletariat, a betrayal which doomed a number of nineteenth-century revolutions, irrespective of how sincere and devoted to socialism the leaders and supporters of such a policy may have been.

The proletariat cannot and must not support a war government, a restoration government. To fight reaction, to rebuff all possible and probable attempts by the Romanovs and their friends to restore the monarchy and muster a counter revolutionary army, it is necessary not to support Guchkov and Co., but to *organise*, expand and strengthen a *proletarian* militia, to arm the people under the leadership of the workers. Without this principal, fundamental, radical measure, there can be no question either of offering serious resistance to the restoration of the monarchy and attempts to rescind or curtail the promised freedoms, or of firmly taking the road that will give the people bread, *peace* and freedom.

If it is true that Chkheidze, who, with Kerensky, was a member of the first Provisional Government (the Duma committee of thirteen), refrained from entering the second Provisional Government out of principled considerations of the above-mentioned or similar character, then that does him credit. That must be said frankly. Unfortunately,

such an interpretation is contradicted by the facts, and primarily by the speech delivered by Skobelev, who has always gone hand in hand with Chkheidze.

Skobelev said, if the above-mentioned source is to be trusted, that “the social [? evidently the Social-Democratic] group and the workers are only slightly in touch (have little contact) with the aims of the Provisional Government”, that the workers are demanding peace, and that if the war is continued there will be disaster in the spring anyhow, that “the workers have concluded with society [liberal society] a temporary agreement [*eine vorläufige Waffenfreundschaft*], although their political aims are as far removed from the aims of society as heaven is from earth”, that “the liberals must abandon the senseless [*unsinnige*] aims of the war”, etc.

This speech is a sample of what we called above, in the excerpt from *Sotsial-Demokrat*. “oscillation” between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The liberals, while remaining liberals, *cannot* “abandon” the “senseless” aims of the war, which, incidentally, are not determined by them alone, but by Anglo-French finance capital, a world-mighty force measured by hundreds of billions. The task is not to “coax” the liberals, but to *explain* to the workers why the liberals find themselves in a blind alley, why *they* are hound hand and foot, why they *conceal* both the treaties tsarism concluded with England and other countries and the deals between Russian and Anglo-French capital, and so forth.

If Skobelev says that the workers have concluded an agreement with liberal society, no matter of what character, and since he does not protest against it, does not explain from the Duma rostrum how harmful it is for the workers, he thereby *approves* of the agreement. And that is exactly what he should not do.

Skobelev’s direct or indirect, clearly expressed or tacit, approval of the agreement between the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies and the Provisional Government is Skobelev’s swing towards the bourgeoisie. Skobelev’s statement that the workers are demanding peace, that their aims are as far removed from the liberals’ aims as heaven is from earth, is Skobelev’s swing towards the proletariat.

Purely proletarian, truly revolutionary and profoundly correct in design is the second political idea in the manifesto of the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies that we are studying, namely, the idea of establishing a “Supervising Committee” (I do not know whether this is what it is called in Russian; I am translating freely from the French), of proletarian-soldier supervision over the Provisional Government.

Now, that’s something real! it is worthy of the workers who have shed their blood for freedom, peace, bread for the people! It is a *real step* towards *real guarantees* against tsarism, against a monarchy and against the monarchists Guchkov, Lvov and Co.! It is a sign that the Russian proletariat, in spite of everything, has made progress compared

with the French proletariat in 1848, when it “authorised” Louis Blanc! It is proof that the instinct and mind of the proletarian masses are not satisfied with declamations, exclamations, promises of reforms and freedoms, with the title of “minister authorised by the workers”, and similar tinsel, but are seeking support *only* where it is to be found, in the *armed* masses of the people organised and led by the proletariat, the class-conscious workers.

It is a step along the right road, but *only* the first step.

If this “Supervising Committee” remains a purely political-type parliamentary institution, a committee that will “put questions” to the Provisional Government and receive answers from it, then it will remain a plaything, will amount to nothing.

If, on the other hand, it leads, immediately and despite all obstacles, to the formation of a *workers’ militia*, or *workers’ home guard*, extending to the whole people, to all men and women, which would not only replace the exterminated and dissolved police force, not only make the latter’s restoration *impossible* by *any* government, constitutional-monarchist or democratic-republican, *either* in St. Petersburg *or* anywhere else in Russia—then the advanced workers of Russia will really take the road towards new and great victories, the road to victory over war, to the realisation of the slogan which, as the newspapers report, adorned the colours of the cavalry troops that demonstrated in St. Petersburg, in the square outside the State Duma:

“Long Live Socialist Republics in All Countries!”

I will set out my ideas about this workers’ militia in my next letter.

In it I will try to show, on the one hand, that the formation of a militia embracing the entire people and led by the workers is the correct slogan of the day, one that corresponds to the tactical tasks of the peculiar transitional moment through which the Russian revolution (and the world revolution) is passing; and, on the other hand, that to be successful, this workers’ militia must, firstly, embrace the entire people, must be a mass organisation to the degree of being *universal*, must really embrace the *entire* able-bodied population of both sexes; secondly, it must proceed to combine not only purely police, but general state functions with military functions and with the control of social production and distribution.

N. Lenin

Zurich, March 22 (9), 1917

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